Providing feedback

This resource is the result of the collaboration of numerous educational leaders from across Victoria. Their input and feedback was essential in tailoring the guide to meet schools’ needs. This is the first version of the resource and your feedback will assist the Department in further improving the guide.

You can provide input into the development of future versions by emailing fiso@education.vic.gov.au
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INTRODUCTION

Achieving goals depends on effective implementation. There are various barriers to, as well as enablers that support, implementation and the achievement of goals. Strategic enablers are those capabilities and processes that support embedding the stages of the FISO Improvement Cycle in what teachers do to improve learning and teaching.

This guide describes four strategic enablers that cut across and support learning and teaching in all FISO dimensions within the Improvement Cycle. It aims to support school leaders to reflect on and strengthen these enablers as they endeavour to focus on priority areas and maintain continuous improvement.

Four strategic enablers to support implementation
1. Self-evaluation capability throughout a school
2. Real-time data for monitoring implementation
3. Leadership capability for school improvement
4. Robust implementation structures

Each of these may already be an effective enabler in your school. One or more may warrant more intensive attention, and each enabler can be used to support any FISO dimension.

Essential Elements for School Improvement
Three Essential Elements form the foundation for school improvement across all FISO dimensions1 and are pre-conditions to strengthening these enablers. They are:
1. A School Improvement Team (SIT) that develops, oversees and evaluates the effectiveness and impact of improvement initiatives such as those in the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP).
2. Explicit use of evidence-based school improvement strategies and teacher professional practice activities.
3. A culture of data collection, analysis and evaluation of student learning growth over time.

If these pre-conditions are not present to some extent in your school, actions to embed them should be included in your next AIP. Ensuring the Essential Elements are deeply embedded in your school, particularly those elements requiring cultural shifts, will require time.

How to use this guide
This guide is intended to be used with the FISO Continua of Practice. The Continua helps leaders and teachers self-evaluate and identify aspects of school and classroom practice where they will focus improvement efforts. This guide supports school leaders and teachers to leverage strategic enablers to support effective implementation within given focus areas.

As context and circumstances vary from school to school, the steps for navigating the stages of the Improvement Cycle are modifiable. The guide will be most useful when school leaders carefully consider the identified focus area, evidence of practice and measures of performance.

1 The remaining Essential Elements have been integrated into the FISO Continua of Practice, for which more information can be found on page 7 of the Continua at https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/Improvement/ContinuaForSchoolImprovement.pdf
The SIT may use these suggested steps to engage with the guide:

1. Self-evaluate against the refined Continua, using the suggested improvement measures as evidence of progress, in addition to practice and performance evidence.

2. Take the identified focus areas, context and other evidence, and prioritise the key improvement strategies for focus including the 2021 Priorities Goal.

3. Consider to what extent the school and staff are ready to implement changes, consulting this guide as a supporting resource. One or more of the enablers may align and support improvement strategies, actions or activities identified in your plan. For example, AIP actions and activities with a focus on building data capability, data walls and using evidence to inform differentiation and interventions may require building capabilities in real-time data monitoring.

4. In developing, monitoring and implementing your school’s plan, one or more of the enablers may require attention and integration into your plan. For example, AIP actions focused on whole school approaches to wellbeing or community engagement may require strengthening leadership.

5. Review the explanation and evidence of the strategic enablers the SIT has identified to strengthen. Use the discussion starters to build a shared understanding of the practices and approaches which will be developed to better leverage the enablers.

### Connecting Strategic Enablers with 2021 Priority Areas

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand current conditions to select priority actions from all three areas</td>
<td>Develop data capabilities of teachers and education support staff</td>
<td>Whole school approaches to wellbeing or community engagement</td>
<td>Establish, embed and/or maintain PLC/PLT structures</td>
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<td>Use multiple sources of evidence, evaluate the effectiveness of approaches and programs at regular monitoring points in the year</td>
<td>Establish processes/structures for collecting and monitoring school-wide data</td>
<td>Planning of whole school professional learning</td>
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<td>Identify digital tools that were successful for monitoring during flexible and remote learning and how they can continue to be implemented</td>
<td>Appointment and staffing of programs</td>
<td>Strengthen engagement in regional and network communities of practice</td>
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<td>Prioritisation of time</td>
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<td>Establish/embed consistent approaches and processes</td>
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Table 1
1 SELF-EVALUATION CAPABILITY THROUGHOUT A SCHOOL

What is it?
Self-evaluation capability is part of the everyday practice of students, staff, leaders and schools.

Rigorous self-evaluation is not only for school review or annual planning. It can be an integral part of a school’s regular planning and monitoring, and teaching and learning cycles. Self-evaluation supports a school culture in which reflection and continuous improvement are valued, and in which the active involvement of teachers, students and the community in self-evaluation is a central part of the process.

The Continua is the key instrument available to schools for high-quality self-evaluation. Schools use the Continua to identify areas of practice that require additional attention so that they can deliver improved learning and teaching. They use the Continua to evaluate their current practice and understand what improvements are needed. Other complementary instruments available include the Practice Principles Reflection Tools, part of the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model (VTLM), which can be used by individual and teams of teachers.

Why is it needed?
Understanding current conditions in a school is critical to planning changes for improvement.

Evidence shows that a process of self-evaluation can lead to sustainable school improvement. It helps students, teachers and leaders create new knowledge collaboratively, change relationships between school community members, and make decisions about future planning.

Effective self-evaluation primarily serves as a formative input for school improvement. It has a tangible influence on thinking and reflection across a school and builds the sensitivity and direction for school improvement. It can generate more engaging teaching and learner-centred classroom practices.

Self-evaluation supports sustained, continuous school improvement (Fullan 2017; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) and is a central element of school improvement in high-performing school systems such as those of Singapore, Finland, Germany, Estonia and Taiwan (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019).

Self-evaluation helps school leaders and teachers develop a shared understanding of what current practice looks like, to accurately identify highest-priority focus areas (Schildkamp et al., 2012). Schools can then accelerate improvement by implementing evidence-based, well-planned strategies in focus areas.

Key features
Self-evaluation attempts to answer three key questions with students, staff and leaders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How well are we doing?</td>
<td>Reflecting on current practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we know we are doing well?</td>
<td>Using a range of data and evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can we do better?</td>
<td>Identifying and prioritising needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be effective, self-evaluation must be rigorous and robust, at a similar level of depth to a review report but produced by the school itself.

Continuously improving schools share common ways of building and leveraging their self-evaluation capabilities. Practices include:

- using multiple data points and evidence, and listening to different perspectives and the views of students, teachers, staff and community members (Fullan, 2007; MacBeath, 2004; Nelson et al., 2015; Timperley et al., 2016)
- ensuring self-evaluation is genuinely evaluative, rather than descriptive, and includes actionable conclusions (Blok et al., 2008)
- having strong leadership and school culture in place to support self-evaluation (Chan et al., 2016)
- proactively seeking out formal and informal feedback from students/parents/carers/kin, classroom observations, peer observations, student engagement, and performance data (Bubb & Earley 2008)
- using self-evaluation as a diagnostic tool to pinpoint barriers and tailor improvement strategies
- mapping a successful improvement strategy to be applied more widely
- using self-evaluation techniques at different times, such as when curriculum or unit designs are being developed, or when intended learning outcomes are being clarified and defined.

Getting this right – discussion starters

Self-evaluation should be sufficiently formalised, so that schools regard self-evaluation and reflection as a purposeful professional responsibility to be prioritised, rather than seen as a compliance activity.

**Questions/tasks:** list and categorise your self-evaluation approaches/activities. Do you have the ‘right’ level of formality versus informality? Could the balance be improved?

Self-evaluation needs to be genuinely evaluative rather than descriptive. It should draw on valid evidence and include actionable conclusions that are decided collectively, have engaged a wide group in the school community and have been communicated widely.

**Question:** what are the school’s strengths and weaknesses in self-evaluation and how might capability gaps be rectified?

The most successful examples of internal evaluation are those that recognise the need to build capacity to give teachers and students a voice, interpret data, work collaboratively and monitor change.

**Question:** what are the opportunities for building meaningful collaborative processes for engagement in self-evaluation?
2 REAL-TIME DATA FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

What is it?
Schools know their students’ learning achievements. They also have data on the opinions of teachers, parents and students.

Yet schools may find it more difficult to assemble data that tells them what has contributed most to the rise or fall in student achievement, engagement and wellbeing. It is these data that are needed to drive improvement in learning and teaching. These data have a different quality: collected more frequently, collected on implementation as well as on student achievement, and linked to professional practice.

Real-time data on the effectiveness and frequency of the use of specific inputs may be easily gathered (such as using learning intentions and adopting new questioning techniques). Data may also be gathered on the frequency or focus of outputs (such as the percentage of teachers who are increasing opportunities for students to write, or the percentage of students who are completing homework). These data points reflect teachers’ and students’ daily experience in the classroom. They can be generated by schools, using readily accessible tools, and become part of regular practices.

Why is it needed?
It might seem obvious, but data is only as valuable as its use to prompt informed changes to school practices (Moyle, 2016). The tools and systems for collecting data alone are not enough to support implementation and change. Collecting and analysing data is only effective if it stimulates questions about the learning that is taking place, and how well the school is operating. The data needs to be sufficiently diverse to inform decision-making on a wide front.

Research shows many schools have indicated they need to strengthen their access to and capability for collecting, interpreting and reflecting on evidence. Schools may need to use a broad range of evidence to support their self-evaluations. School leaders and teachers want to be able to collect meaningful data on classroom practices so that they can track the effectiveness of changes in practices over time, and how practices might change to improve learning and teaching.

School leaders need to constantly monitor performance indicators by using data to identify school processes that need improvement (Heffernan, 2018). Principals who use data-driven practices to implement change are “more positively associated with teachers’ perception toward school reform outcomes” (Yoon, 2016, p. 516). Schools face increasing complexity in managing the collection, analysis and storage of data, including building data literacy to analyse and to present findings in a clear and readable way (Keuning et al., 2016; Schildkamp et al., 2016).
Key features
Real-time monitoring data collected is considered with other data available through Panorama and quality-assured assessment tools. Table 2 below provides a broad overview of data available to schools, which will help the SIT identify gaps in their data and realise opportunities to create tools to capture real-time monitoring data. Before choosing what data to generate and analyse, the SIT will want to consider:

- What student learning-centred question/s are you trying to answer?
- What data will help you answer that question?
- What are the strengths and limitations of available data?
- How will you analyse the data?
- How will you take the results and turn into action to change practice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PANORAMA</th>
<th>QUALITY-ASSURED ASSESSMENT TOOLS</th>
<th>REAL-TIME MONITORING DATA</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Assessment tools available on the Insight Assessment Platform</td>
<td>Data walls</td>
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<tr>
<td>• NAPLAN</td>
<td>• English Online Interview</td>
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<td>• NAPLAN comparison to Teacher Judgement</td>
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<td>• Fractions and Decimals Online Interview</td>
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<td>• Attitudes to School Survey</td>
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<td>School climate</td>
<td>• Literacy and Numeracy Check-in Assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>• School Staff Survey</td>
<td>• Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (MYLNS) tool</td>
<td>School-developed surveys for students/staff/parents/carers/kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Survey comparison</td>
<td>• English (Reading) and Mathematics Level Assessment</td>
<td>Self-evaluation data from sources such as Continua, Practice Principles and VCAA self-assessment tools</td>
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<td>Senior secondary</td>
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<td>• VCE</td>
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Table 2
Research has found that schools that continuously improve:

- regularly communicate progress with students and parents/carers/kin (Brown et al., 2019; Robinson, et al., 2017)
- regularly train and upskill staff on drawing insights from student achievement data, so they can understand trends, patterns and reasons for changes in learning, and apply strategies accordingly (Brown & Greany, 2018; Moyle, 2016)
- prioritise time for staff to fully engage with data, building a culture of data-driven decision-making (Keuning et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2016)
- leverage a diverse range of data and metrics to inform and support their strategies for school improvement. This includes triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, and formative and summative performance data (Yoon, 2016).

**Getting this right – discussion starters**

The way data is used by systems or by schools now needs to move from a focus on measuring performance to one of improving performance.

**Questions:** using Table 2 above on the data sets available, what are the strengths and limitations of each data source, and how well does your school use each data source? What real-time data could you be collecting and using? Are there opportunities to strengthen data literacy in your school?

Schools can develop real-time, practice-focused evidence that can be used to monitor reform implementation and generate and verify self-evaluation outcomes. Routine data collection and strong data management processes are important pre-requisites to ensure ready access to a wide range of sources to inform improvement progress.

**Question:** what data (inputs, outputs and outcomes) would be most useful for monitoring implementation progress and identifying what is most effective for engaging students, lifting effort and improving understanding?

The collection and use of real-time data for self-reflection and decision-making can be generated from a variety of sources and serve different purposes. It is important to use the data to understand whether the implementation is working and what its impact is for students and teachers.

**Questions:** are the options in Table 2 for real-time monitoring data feasible? What would you add? Which options could you try?
3 LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

What is it?
Effective and shared leadership drives improvement across the whole school, not just in pockets. Middle leaders are integral to building this culture with support from school leadership. Middle leaders are crucial to the leadership environment and the general school climate that supports improvement. They are an important bridge between school leadership, accountability for improving school performance and teachers.

The challenge is to ensure middle leaders have the capabilities to fulfil these expectations. While the leadership capabilities required of school principals have been identified, and supports are available, there remains a need to develop capability within middle layers of leadership.

The size and context of schools affects staff roles: small schools do not have the same internal structures as larger schools. Middle leaders in larger schools could be responsible for year-level coordination, health and wellbeing, or a learning area. In a smaller school, these roles are likely to be shared, and in a very small school, all the leaders and teachers might collectively comprise the leadership team.

Why is it needed?
Success in continuous and sustained improvement depends on informed and engaged leaders, who are not only active themselves but also involve others. A key condition for success is that there is a strong and united leadership team that speaks with one voice on directions for improvement (Day et al., 2016). Capable middle leaders can make the difference between strategies succeeding or failing.

High-performing middle leaders can contribute immensely to the success of a school. However, opportunities can be missed if their skills are not developed and nurtured, or their roles are not clear, or if organisational and implementation structures do not include a role for middle leaders (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018).

Key features
Investing in developing middle leaders’ capabilities can contribute directly to the success of a school’s improvement agenda. A starting point is to use leadership standards to guide practice and incorporate a range of professional learning strategies, with an emphasis on mentoring, coaching, shadowing and applying learning to specific workplaces and their school improvement strategies.

Roles for middle leaders can include:
- supporting the creation of expert teaching teams and leading the development of effective pedagogical practices
- serving as the connectors between leaders and classroom teachers
- influencing teaching practice by communicating the school’s improvement agenda to teachers, teaching teams, and PLCs/PLTs
- leading whole-school literacy or numeracy improvement.
Getting this right – discussion starters

The roles of middle leaders may be loosely defined in schools, and perhaps have an administrative focus. Yet middle leadership is about more than distributing responsibilities. Rather, it calls for ensuring middle leaders are empowered to lead in school improvement and to make greater contributions to leadership in the school more generally.

Questions: do you have a statement on expectations, boundaries and authority for middle leaders? If ‘no’, what should it contain? If ‘yes’, how well does it tie in with whole-school improvement? How does the Performance and Development Plan (PDP) process support this?

School improvement is complex and requires leadership at different levels of the school. Effective middle leadership works at two levels: in a specific area of responsibility (such as literacy or inclusion), but also as part of a whole-school improvement focus (such tracking achievement and data analysis). The busy life of schools can make finding the balance difficult.

Question: what arrangements work best in encouraging school leaders and middle leaders to collaborate on school improvement?

If middle leaders can develop their knowledge and skill sets, they can share leadership responsibilities for whole-school improvement, helping to influence teaching practices and ensure better learning for all students.

Questions: what capabilities do middle leaders need? What are/should be professional learning opportunities for middle leaders?
4 ROBUST IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

What is it?

Having the right organisational structure can ensure that the improvement strategies prioritised by schools are not only fit-for-purpose, but also effectively implemented, adopted and sustained. Schools vary, but structures may include:

- a leadership team that ensures appropriate structures, processes, protocols and operating rhythms are in place for effective implementation
- a SIT that provides overall guidance and support to teachers throughout the school to ensure appropriate focus on school improvement
- PLCs/PLTs that collaborate and take improvement and implementation strategies to the classroom level
- a performance and development process which privileges the improvement strategies of the school alongside the development goals for individual teachers as in the PDP
- Communities of Practice and networks across schools.

The development of effective organisational structures in schools depends on the relational work of school leaders (Cosner & Jones, 2016; Setlhodi, 2019). See the Department’s Organisation Design Guide for Victorian School Leaders for support in how to conduct organisation design reviews for schools.

Why is it needed?

Implementation can often fall short of expectations because there is a poor link between identifying what changes are needed and knowing how to generate, review and sustain the actions at the school-level that drive improvement.

Evidence shows that effective implementation requires school leaders who operate not only at a strategic level by setting the direction, but also at an operational level by establishing structures, creating the right culture and ensuring staff are ready for change. Effective leaders connect with staff and strengthen relationships with staff by ‘walking the talk’ and distributing or sharing leadership.
**Key features**

Good practices for establishing and sustaining robust implementation structures include:

- a statement for each team or committee that outlines its purpose, membership and ways of operating
- an explicit commitment by each team or committee to set objectives, communicate and monitor the effectiveness of what matters most
- team or committee members who are committed to active involvement and who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- a map that shows how functions are interrelated
- targeted professional learning options that enable staff participation
- implementation teams that address the challenge of having to allocate time to additional activities while continuing day-to-day responsibilities.

**Getting this right – discussion starters**

Building a strong implementation culture is challenging and complex. It depends not only on engaged leaders, but on others ‘stepping up’ to be involved and take responsibility for parts of initiatives. You need an implementation-friendly and implementation-ready environment.

**Questions:** do you have an environment that is conducive to good implementation? Do staff feel empowered to step forward and assume responsibility? Is space and time given commensurate with the work expected?

The PDP process is a key part of the improvement implementation structure of the school.

**Questions:** does the PDP emphasise the improvement strategies of the school? Are teachers given space and support to implement plans? Does the PDP process provide the basis for collaboration among colleagues? How close to classroom improvement are the goals established by the process?

Alignment and coherence among teams is essential. All staff need to engage in planning how to implement and monitor their functions, while understanding the roles of others.

**Questions:** do you have a map of the current teams? Can responsibilities be clarified further? Are there gaps?

High-performing teams or committees have as a minimum:

- a clear purpose that is directed at improving student outcomes
- a collaborative and trusting culture, rather than members working alone
- a collective enquiry method that builds on strengths
- an orientation towards results
- active participation by students.

**Questions:** how can you rate the effectiveness of your teams? Where is improvement needed?
REFERENCES


